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^c There is, indeed, one circumstance which looks like a miracle, recorded in his life by Plinius, which may be found extracted out of a Greek manuscript, in the great work of the Bollandists, under the date of January 26, p. 696. The story is to this effect, that when a certain noble matron, whose name was Callisto, who had been very kind to Polycarp, had exhausted all her granaries in relieving the poor, at a time of great public distress, the granaries were suddenly filled again, through Polycarp's prayers. We will only observe that Plinius lived at least more than a century after the death of Polycarp; and that he does not tell us from what source the story was derived. Hence, although the period in question (nearly the close of the first century) was one in which miraculous gifts abounded in the Church, yet we must admit that the story rests on insufficient evidence.

learned from the Apostles, which, also, he handed down to the Church. He persevered steadily to the end, and in the extremity of old age he departed this life, having suffered martyrdom in the most glorious and conspicuous manner."

The statement here given by Irenæus that Polycarp was made Bishop of Smyrna by the Apostles is repeated from him by Eusebius and other writers; and Tertullian adds the additional fact, that St. John was the Apostle by whom the appointment was made.* This fact is particularly deserving of notice, if the conclusion drawn from it by Archbishop Ussher be true—namely, that Polycarp was the angel, or Bishop of the Church at Smyrna, to whom St. John was commissioned to address the message recorded in the second chapter of the Revelation. Indeed, if we bear in mind that this book was written not long before the Apostle's death, and that Polycarp, as we have seen, was appointed Bishop of the Church at Smyrna by St. John, and certainly survived him for many years, it seems by no means improbable that Polycarp was actually Bishop of the Church at Smyrna when the Revelation was composed; and if so, he was certainly the angel to whom St. John was commissioned to address these words, "And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive, I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty; but thou art rich. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: I know faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. ii. 8, seq.). If this prediction was really addressed to Polycarp, we shall presently see that it was minutely and strikingly fulfilled.

Not many years after St. John's death, when the persecution of Trajan against the Christians began to be enforced, Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch was condemned by the Emperor, and sentenced to be brought to Rome, in order to be executed. In his voyage thither he touched at Smyrna, to salute and converse with Polycarp; and there, as we have reason to believe, these good and faithful men mutually comforted and encouraged each other, under the trials to which they were severally exposed. From Smyrna Ignatius and his company sailed to Troas, from which place he sent back an Epistle to the Church of Smyrna, wherein he endeavours to warn them against some of the errors of the times which had crept in amongst them; and besides this he wrote particularly to Polycarp, commending the Church of Antioch to his care. From this date (A.D. 107) we hear nothing of Polycarp for many years, until an unhappy dissension which arose in the Church brought him again prominently forward.

The difference in question arose about the exact day on which the festival of Easter should be observed, and about the manner of observing the Easter fast. Upon this point the Eastern and Western Churches were divided in opinion; and each justified its practice by apostolic tradition.† In order to appease this dissension if possible, Polycarp, about A.D. 158, undertook a journey to Rome. Anicetus was then Bishop of that see, and the account which Irenæus (who, we have seen, was a disciple of Polycarp) gives of the result of their interview is extremely remarkable. The passage is quoted as follows by the historian Eusebius:‡

"The difference in our fasting establishes the unanimity of our faith.... When Polycarp of blessed memory came to Rome in the time of Anicetus, and there had been a small controversy between them concerning some other things, they straightway mutually embraced each other, having no desire to dispute much with one another about this matter. For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it [the Easter fast] because he had always kept it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other Apostles with whom he had been conversant; nor did Polycarp induce Anicetus not to observe it, who said, that he ought to retain the usages of the presbyters that were his predecessors. Which things being so, they received the communion together. And Anicetus permitted Polycarp (from an honourable respect for him) to consecrate the Sacrament in his own Church; and they parted peaceably one from another; both those who observed it [the fast] and those who observed it not retaining the peace and communion of the whole Church."

The entire of this narrative is singularly instructive. It not only sets forth, in a very striking light, the mingled firmness and moderation of Polycarp, but it likewise enables us to form a just estimate of the true position occupied by the Bishop of Rome in those days. We hear nothing of the infallibility of the Pope, as successor of St. Peter; nothing of his supreme authority to rule and govern the universal Church. Polycarp and

Anicetus meet on terms of absolute equality; they mutually endeavour each to alter the other's opinion; and when neither could succeed, they agree to differ, and, in the words of the historian: "they parted peaceably one from another." It would have been well for the peace and harmony of the Christian world if the popes had always been influenced by the same spirit of moderation and forbearance.

The days of the good bishop Polycarp were now, however, drawing to a close. In the year 166, the persecution of the Christians under Marcus Aurelius Antoninus commenced, and in a little while it raged with the greatest violence throughout Asia Minor. The letter is still extant in which the sorrowing Church of Smyrna relates to the Christian community at Philomelium the manner of Polycarp's death. The antiquity of this letter, no less than the touching character of the scene which it describes, combine to render it one of the most remarkable documents in the whole range of ecclesiastical history. We must content ourselves with a brief outline of the events which it details.

Polycarp, during the persecution at Smyrna, had been urged by his friends to retire to a neighbouring village, where he passed the greater part of his time in prayer. Here three days before his apprehension, he had a remarkable dream, which his anticipation of his fate led him to interpret as an intimation that he should be burnt alive, a foreboding but too exactly verified by the event. After many Christians in Smyrna had sealed their testimony with their blood, the cry rose among the infuriated populace, "Away with the Atheists! let Polycarp be apprehended." His place of concealment was betrayed by two slaves, who were forced by torture to confess it. When the officers arrived, Polycarp calmly said, "The will of the Lord be done;" and after spending two hours in prayer, he was conducted to the city. He was met by Herod, the chief magistrate, and his father Nicetas, who took him into their own carriage, and vainly endeavoured to persuade him to submit to the two tests usually proposed to the Christians, namely, to acknowledge the emperor as Lord, and to offer sacrifice. On his determined refusal he was hastily thrust out of the chariot, and conducted to the theatre, the benches of which, rising one above another, were crowded with frantic spectators.

The proconsul, Stratius Quadratus, appeared touched with pity for the venerable bishop, and urged him to deny the Christian faith. "Begrud," saith he, "thy great age; swear by the genius of Cæsar; swear, and I will release thee; blaspheme Christ." The proposal was rejected with indignant scorn. "Eighty and six years," said Polycarp, "have I served Christ, and He has never done me an injury; how can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" The proconsul threatened to expose him to the wild beasts. He replied again, "It is well for me to be speedily released from this life of misery." The proconsul threatened to burn him alive. He replied once more, "I fear not the fire that burns for a moment; thou knowest not that which burns for ever and ever." His countenance was full of peace and joy, even when the herald advanced into the midst of the assemblage, and thrice proclaimed, "Polycarp has professed himself a Christian."

A general cry arose among the populace, that the bishop should be burned alive. The Jews were as vindictively active as the heathen in collecting the fuel of the baths and other combustibles, to raise up a hasty, yet capacious, funeral pile. The venerable martyr was speedily bound to the stake; and then offered up the following simple and touching prayer:

"O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy well-beloved and ever blessed son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of Thee; the God of angels, powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before Thee; I bless Thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and this hour, that I may receive a portion in the number of Thy martyrs, and drink of Christ's cup, for the resurrection to eternal life both of body and soul, in the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit; among whom may I be admitted this day, as a pure and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou, O true and faithful God, has prepared and fore-shown and accomplished. Wherefore I praise thee for all Thy mercies, I bless thee, I glorify thee, with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, to whom with Thee and the Holy Spirit be glory now and ever."

The fire was kindled by the executioners; but the flames arose around the pious martyr, curving like an arch, or like a sail swelling with the wind, leaving his body unharmed. A spearman was sent in to dispatch the sufferer: his side was pierced, and blood enough

flowed from his aged body to extinguish the flames immediately around him.

The malice of the enemies of Polycarp did not end with his death. His friends and followers were anxious to give the remains of the martyr an honourable burial, but the Jews and others advised the proconsul not to bestow his body on the Christians, lest leaving their Divine Master, they should henceforth worship Polycarp. This calumnious charge is repelled with scorn in the letter of the Church of Smyrna (from which the entire narrative is taken), in the following emphatic words: "They little consider how impossible it is that either we should forsake Christ, who died for the salvation of the whole world, or that we should ever worship any other. For we adore Him as being the Son of God; but martyrs as the disciples and followers of our Lord, we deservedly love for their eminent kindness towards their own Prince and Master, whose companions and fellow-disciples we also by all means desire to be." Nothing can be clearer than this testimony to prove how far removed those pious and primitive Christians were from that undue and superstitious veneration of the relics of martyrs and departed saints, which after ages introduced into the Church.

Some of the circumstances introduced into the foregoing narrative, as well as other incidents contained in the letter of the Church of Smyrna, may seem to verge on the supernatural; but they are no more than may be ascribed to the high-wrought imagination of the Christian spectators deepening every incident into a wonder. The whole narrative has the simple energy of truth. The prudent, yet resolute conduct of the aged bishop—the expostulation of the governor—the brutal fury of the populace—the Jews eagerly seizing the opportunity of testifying their hatred to the Christian name: all are simply yet vividly portrayed. And if we are right in identifying Polycarp with the angel of the Church of Smyrna in the Apocalypse, we cannot but be struck with the exact conformity between the prophecy and the fulfillment. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; be thou faithful unto death: and I will give thee a crown of life."

We conclude in the words of the ancient document, to which we have so often referred.

"Thus far concerning the blessed Polycarp. Eleven brethren from Philadelphia suffered with him, but he alone is particularly celebrated by all. Even by Gentiles he is spoken of in every place. He was in truth, not only an illustrious teacher, but also an eminent writer, whose martyrdom all desire to imitate, because it was regulated exactly by evangelical principles. For by patience he conquered the unjust magistrate; and thus receiving the crown of immortality, and exulting with apostles and all the righteous, he glorifies God, even the Father, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of our souls and the Ruler of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the universal Church throughout the world!"

PRIVATE JUDGMENT.

Of all the controversies with the Church of Rome which have been discussed in our pages, the question concerning the use of private judgment is, in one sense, the most important; for if this question were decided against us, it would be no use to us to obtain a victory on all the rest. What advantage would it be to prove to the satisfaction of our readers that, according to our private judgment and theirs, there was no such place as purgatory, no such thing as transubstantiation, that we ought not to use invocation of saints, and so forth, if, after all, we had to own that neither we nor they had any right to use our private judgment at all?

It is well for us that the principle which is of such vital importance in this controversy is also the easiest to establish. We might say a good deal about the right of private judgment, and something more as to the duty of private judgment, but we think it enough now to prove the necessity of private judgment. We use our private judgment because we cannot help it. All the choice we have got is, whether we shall exercise our private judgment in one single act or in a great many; but exercise it one way or other we must. We may either apply our private judgment separately to the different questions in controversy, purgatory, transubstantiation, invocation of saints, &c., and come to our own conclusion on each; or we may apply our private judgment to the question whether the Church is infallible, and if we decide that it is, then take all the rest of our opinions on trust from the priest. But it is clear that we cannot be certain that any of these opinions are right unless our private judgment has decided the question rightly whether we ought to submit implicitly to the Church; and this is just as hard as any question in the controversy. It is just as if we had the disposal of a large sum of money. We might lay it out ourselves on the various objects which we judged fit; or we might give it away in one lump sum to somebody else; but that is all the choice we have. If the money is once in our hands we cannot avoid deciding, either by one single act of our judgment or by a great many, which shall be the next hands it shall get into.

People don't like private judgment because they don't

* Irenæus, adv. Hæc. lib. iii., c. lli., p. 203, Oxon. 1702.

† Hæc enim modo ecclesie apostolicæ consensu sunt definitæ; sicut Smyrnonum ecclesia Polycarpum ab Irenæo confortatus refert. Tertull. de præsc. Hæc. cap. xxviii., p. 212. Paris. 1675.

‡ Vide Care. Life of Polycarp, p. 111. London, 1677. Gold. Patr. Apost., vol. ii., p. 198. Note Amstel. 1794.

§ This is one example among several that might be readily adduced, how liable tradition is to be corrupted in the lapse of time. If all the Apostles actually observed Easter upon the same day, how did it come to pass that in the short space of a century the eastern, Western and Western Churches adopted different usages, and each pleaded apostolic authority? It is plain that both could not be right.

¶ Smith. Hist. lib. v. cap. 24.

§ Our readers, we doubt not, will observe that throughout the entire of this prayer, one of the most ancient and valuable memorials of the worship of the primitive Church, there is not the slightest allusion to the Virgin Mary, and no address or petition to saints or angels. We ask our Roman Catholic friends to attend particularly to this circumstance. Could Polycarp have omitted all mention of the Virgin Mary if he had believed (as the present Pope Pius IX. wrote in his Encyclical Letter of Feb. 2, 1849) that "God hath placed the plenitude of all good in her in such a manner, that if there be in us any hope, if there be any spiritual health, we know that it is from her that we receive it, because such is the will of Him who hath united that we should have all by the instrumentality of Mary (quia sic est voluntas ejus, qui totum nos habere voluit per Mariam)?"

† Vide Eusebius Eccl. Hist., lib. iv., cap. 16.